

# Persuasion and groups



**PERSUASION IN SMALL GROUPS**In the social sciences a group can be defined as two or more humans who interact with one another, accept expectations and obligations as members of the group, and share a common identity. By this definition, society can be viewed as a large group.

resume writing service kitchener A true group exhibits some degree of social cohesion and is more than a simple collection or aggregate of individuals.

Characteristics shared by members of a group may include interests, values, representations, ethnic or social background, and kinship ties

**Types of groups**Primary groups are small groups with intimate, kinship-based relationships: families, for example. They commonly last for years.

They are small and display face-to-face interaction. Secondary groups, in contrast to primary groups, are large groups involving formal and institutional relationships. They may last for years or may disband after a short time. Other types of groups include the following: Peer groupA peer group is a group with members of approximately the same age, social status, and interests. Generally, people are relatively equal in terms of power when they interact with peers. CliqueAn informal, tight-knit group, often in a High School/College setting, that shares common interests. Most cliques exhibit an established yet shifting power structure. ClubA club is a group, which usually requires one to apply to become a member.

Such clubs may be dedicated to particular activities: sporting clubs, for example. HouseholdAll individuals who live in the same home. CommunityA community is a group of people with a commonality or sometimes a complex net of overlapping commonalities, often??“ but not always??“ in proximity

with one another with some degree of continuity over time. FranchiseAn organization which runs several instances of a business in many locations. GangA gang is usually an urban group that gathers in a particular area. It is a group of people that often hang around each other. They can be like some clubs, but much less formal.

MobA mob is usually a group of people that has taken the law into their own hands. Mobs are usually groups which gather temporarily for a particular reason. SquadThis is usually a small group, of around 3 to 8 people, who work as a team to accomplish their goals. TeamSimilar to a squad, though a team may contain many more members. Muzafer Sherif (1916??“ 1982) formulated a more technical definition with the following elements: A social unit consisting of a number of individuals interacting with each other with respect to: 1. Common motives and goals; 2. An accepted division of labor, i. e. roles, 3. Established status (social rank, dominance) relationships; 4. Accepted norms and values with reference to matters relevant to the group; 5. Development of accepted sanctions (praise and punishment) if and when norms were respected or violated. Development of a groupIf one brings a small collection of strangers together in a restricted space and environment, provides a common goal and maybe a few ground rules, then a highly probable course of events will follow. Interaction between individuals is the basic requirement. At first, individuals will differentially interact in sets of twos or threes while seeking to interact with those with whom they share something in common: i.

e., interests, skills, and cultural background. Again depending on the common goal, eventually twosomes and threesomes will integrate into larger sets of six or eight, with corresponding revisions of territory, dominance-ranking, and further differentiation of roles. All of this seldom takes place without some conflict or disagreement.

**THEORIES OF GROUP FORMATION**  
**Balance theory** Balance theory, developed by Theodore M. Newcomb, explains the relationship between attraction and similarity. Balance theory is built on cognitive consistency theory, which assumes that people have awareness of their attitudes and behaviors, and the ability to change their attitudes. These relationships can be either balanced or unbalanced.

Balanced states exist either when all relationships are positive or when there is an even number of negative relationships. Unbalanced states exist when there is an uneven number of negative relationships. Balance theory, then, serves as a tool toward understanding attitude change.

This theory is very visible, when we observe Group Formation. Well functioning groups do not just form out of the blue. It takes time for a group to develop to a point where it can be effective and where all members feel connected to it. There are four stages that characterize the development of groups. Understanding these stages can help determine what is happening with a group and how to manage what is occurring.

These four group development stages are known as forming, storming, norming, and performing. **Forming** This is the initial stage when the group comes together and members begin to develop their relationship with one another and learn what is expected of them. This is the stage when team

building begins and trust starts to develop. Group members will start establishing limits on acceptable behavior through experimentation.

Other members' reactions will determine if a behavior will be repeated.

This is also the time when the tasks of the group and the members will be decided. **Storming** During this stage of group development, interpersonal conflicts arise and differences of opinion about the group and its goals will surface. If the group is unable to clearly state its purposes and goals or if it cannot agree on shared goals, the group may collapse at this point. It is important to work through the conflict at this time and to establish clear goals. It is necessary for there to be discussion so everyone feels heard and can come to an agreement on the direction the group is to move in.

**Norming** Once the group resolves its conflicts, it can now establish patterns of how to get its work done. Expectations of one another are clearly articulated and accepted by members of the group.

Formal and informal procedures are established in delegating tasks, responding to questions, and in the process by which the group functions.

**Performing** During this final stage of development, issues related to roles, expectations, and norms are no longer of major importance. The group is now focused on its task, working intentionally and effectively to accomplish its goals.

The group will find that it can celebrate its accomplishments and that members will be learning new skills and sharing roles. After a group enters the performing stage, it is unrealistic to expect it to remain there permanently. When new members join or some people leave, there will be a

new process of forming, storming, and norming engaged as everyone learns about one another. During all the stages there is ? attraction between ? common ? attitudes, differences ? are ? ironed ? out ? by ? negotiation, difficulties ? are reconciled and conflicts ? are ? resolved. Groups are an important fact of life.

Almost every decision that you make involves other people. Thus, the ways in which people influence one another in groups becomes paramount in our understanding of why some decisions are reached. People in groups tend towards agreement. We are not content to have positions that differ; there is always a strain to find which position is correct or appropriate. From this perspective, the different influence processes that we will consider differ mainly in where the consensus is found. Sometimes it is the position favored by the majority, termed conformity. Sometimes, it is the position favored by the minority, termed minority influence.

**MAJORITIES I. Conformity; the Power of Numbers** While most of us think we are quite independent, it is very disconcerting to realize how important sheer numbers are when it comes to influence. The power of peers and, in particular, the power of a majority is one of the most well established findings in Social Psychology. It is so powerful that, faced with a majority of others who agree on a particular attitude or judgment, we are likely to adopt the majority judgment whether their judgment is right or wrong. In a classical study by Solomon Asch (1956), people came to an experiment in groups of 5 to 7.

Unknown to the real subject, however, the other 4 to 6 people were confederates of the experiment. They were hired to agree on a judgment that was wrong. In this experiment, the group was shown a series of slides.

They saw a standard line and were asked to name which of the 3 comparison lines was equal to the standard. This task is easy. When people were alone, they were correct. They knew which line was equal. However, in the experimental setting, the real subject was last; he heard the judgments of the other 4 to 6 people in order. And, one by one, they all agreed on the same answer.

The problem is their answer was incorrect. For example, all would say line 1 was the line equivalent to the standard. What happened? Did people laugh out loud, knowing those other people were incorrect? Did they feel superior while they maintained what was in fact the correct position? No. Fully 1/3 of the responses from the naive subjects were in agreement with the majority; they said line 1. Further, 75% of the people agreed with the erroneous majority on at least one of the trials.

Even when using perceptual items, e. g. length of lines, people will abdicate the information from their own senses and adopt even an erroneous majority view. There is evidence of this phenomenon in many different countries being even stronger in Asian cultures which are assumed to be more concerned with harmony. (Bond and Smith, 1996). The question is Why? Why? people follow the majority, right or wrong, appears to be based on two primary reasons: One is an assumption that truth lies in numbers known as informational influence. The other is a concern about being

accepted and, especially about not being rejected; this is known as normative influence (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955).

Research shows quite clearly that a person, who maintains a dissenting viewpoint, even when they are right, risks possible rejection from their group. In an early study by Schachter (1951), people were discussing a case about a juvenile delinquent and were asked to determine how best to deal with the troubled adolescent. The scale ranged from being very love oriented to being very punishment oriented. The story of this delinquent was written very sympathetically; most people felt that a 2 or 3 on the 7 point scale was appropriate. These were judgments that the boy should be treated mostly with love and only punished when needed. However, in this group, there was a confederate. This person consistently maintained the position of very punishment oriented. What happened He received the most communication, aimed at changing his opinion.

When such persuasion was unsuccessful, the person was disliked, made to feel unwelcome, was not nominated to any leadership positions and was essentially rejected (Schachter, 1951). At this point, we begin to realize that majorities have a great deal of power. Believing that truth lies in numbers, we begin to feel that, if we hold a differing viewpoint, it must mean that we are in error, not the majority. Further, we want to belong, to be accepted. At best, many of us remain silent. II .

Increasing or Decreasing Conformity A majority of 3 has maximum influence; larger majorities do not have more influence. Thus, if you are faced with one



person who differs from you, conformity is quite low; if there are two in agreement against you, conformity increases; at 3, your conformity is maximum. At 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, there are essentially no further increases in conformity. If you are going to conform, 3 is enough (Asch, 1956; Stang,

1976). Other variables that increase the likelihood of conformity are difficulty of the task, ambiguity of the stimulus and uncertainty on the part of the subject. You can create these conditions in many ways but to illustrate from the original Asch study, one could make the lines closer together and thus make the task more ambiguous and more difficult. One could give you information that you were not very good at this task.

All of these variables undermine the confidence of the individual in his or her own judgment and have been found to increase conformity. Others have pointed to the importance of anonymity for reducing conformity. If normative influence is one reason why people conform, you can reduce such fear of rejection by having the judgments given anonymously.

Studies comparing face to face groups with those permitting anonymous answers have shown substantial reduction in conformity when anonymity is permitted (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Some have speculated that conformity would be less when the topic is important to the individual. Experimental studies on this have been mixed, some showing more conformity and some less conformity when the issue is important (Vaughan and Mangan, 1963; Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962). Asch and other researchers have found that many factors influence conformity. These

include: Group size: Asch found that group size influenced whether subjects conformed. The bigger the group, the more people conformed, up to a certain point. After group size reached a certain limit, conformity didn't increase any further. Group unanimity: Asch also found that subjects were much more likely to conform when a group agreed unanimously.

If even one other person in the group disagreed with the group, a subject was much less likely to conform. This was true even when the other dissenter disagreed with the subject as well as the group. Self esteem: People with high self esteem are less likely to conform. Reciprocation: The power of reciprocation is frequently undervalued, but it is incredibly strong and influential across all human cultures. On an everyday level it means that if I give you something, you feel compelled to give me something back. Authority: When faced with an authority figure mere conformity can be transformed into obedience. Social norms III.

Theoretical framework There are various communication theories that seek to explain why people conform to the majority ideology/ view. The most notable of these is the spiral of silence theory. The spiral of silence is a political science and mass communication theory propounded by the German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. The theory asserts that a person is less likely to voice an opinion on a topic if one feels that one is in the minority for fear of reprisal or isolation from the majority. The spiral of silence begins with fear of reprisal or isolation, and escalates from there. Individuals use what is described as “ an innate ability” or quasi-statistical sense to gauge public opinion. The Mass media play a large part in determining what the dominant opinion is. The mass media have an

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enormous impact on how public opinion is portrayed, and can dramatically impact an individual's perception about where public opinion lies, whether or not that portrayal is factual.

Noelle-Neumann describes the spiral of silence as a dynamic process, in which predictions about public opinion become fact as mass media's coverage of the majority opinion becomes the status quo, and the minority becomes less likely to speak out. The theory, however, only applies to moral or opinion issues, not issues that can be proven right or wrong using facts. Crucial points to the theory: People have a fear of being rejected by those in their social environment, which is called "fear of isolation."

"People are constantly observing the behaviors of those around them, and seeing which gain approval and disapproval from society. People unconsciously issue their own threats of isolation by showing signals of approval or disapproval. Threats of isolation are avoided by a person's tendency to refrain from making a statement about something they think might attract objections. People are more willing to publicly state things that they believe will be accepted positively."

The spiral effect begins because when people speak out confidently, the opposition feels a greater sense of fear of isolation and is further convinced to stay silent, since they are in the minority. If there is a social consensus, the spiral will not be activated. There must be two opposing forces. The mass media has a strong influence on this process. Fear and threat of isolation are subconscious processes. The spiral of silence only "holds a sway" over the

public for a limited time. If a topic activates the spiral of silence, this means that the issue is a great threat to social cohesion.

Overcoming the silenceThe theory explains a vocal minority by stating that people who are highly educated, or who have greater affluence, and the few other cavalier individuals who do not fear isolation, are likely to speak out regardless of public opinion. It further states that this minority is a necessary factor of change while the compliant majority is a necessary factor of stability, with both being a product of evolution. | IV. The liberating value of dissentOne of the most important variables for reducing conformity is the presence of a dissenter. We already know how difficult it is to dissent, to express a position different from the majority.

But what happens when a person does dissent We find that the others are liberated. Thus, if you are in a group where a majority differs from you but there is ONE person who agrees with you, you are not likely to conform. In fact, an experiment on this showed that the 33% conformity when alone dropped to 5% when the person had an ally.

You might assume that this happens because the ally gives you confidence in your own judgment. However, what happens is the fact that there is dissent from the majority, not that you have an ally supporting your own position. If there is a person who disagrees both with you and with the majority, conformity is lowered. Thus, if that person is intermediate between you and the majority or if he is even more extreme than the majority, conformity is less (Asch, 1955). V. Majorities induce convergent thinking: Research shows that majorities not only shape judgments and behavior but

they also shape the ways in which individuals think. There are numerous studies (Nemeth, 1995) showing that, when faced with a majority view that differs from their own, people not only adopt the majority position but they convince themselves of the truth of that position by considering the issue only from the majority perspective.

They try to understand why the majority takes the position it does and look at it almost exclusively from their point of view. For example, faced with a majority, people search for information in a biased manner. They primarily read information that explains, justifies and corroborates the majority position. (Nemeth and Rogers, 1986). In problem solving situations as well, people tend to adopt the majority strategy for solving problems to the exclusion of other strategies. MINORITIES I.

Minority Influence: Most of the research literature on influence in groups tends to emphasize the importance and power of majorities and of status. Influence is often seen as flowing from the many to the few, from the strong to the weak. It is clear that there are advantages to being the ??? many??? and having power and status. However, these cannot be the only mechanisms for influence. If one wants to understand social change rather than social control, one must consider the possibility that minority views can be influential. How do new ideas ever get adopted, how do societies changeThe early studies: In the late ??? 60s and early ??? 70s, Moscovici and Faucheux (1972) asserted that minorities do exercise influence but that the way in which this influence is exerted is quite different than that of majorities.

Minority positions do not have the sheer numbers to cause people to accept their position as information about reality; nor to cause fear of rejection by them. In fact, since people assume that truth lies in numbers, they are prone to assume that the minority is in error. In attempting to demonstrate the potential influence of minorities, Moscovici, Lage and Naffrechoux (1969) conducted an experiment which was essentially the reverse of the conformity studies. They had people in groups of 6 judge the color of a series of slides and to indicate its perceived brightness on a 5 point scale. All the slides were in fact the same hue?" a clear ??? blue???. Different perceptions of brightness were accomplished by the use of neutral density filters.

In this study, there were 4 naive subjects; 2 were paid confederates. In one condition (consistent), the two confederates judged each slide to be ??? green???. In a second condition, the confederates called the slides ??? green??? on 2/3 of the trials and ??? blue??? on 1/3 of the trials (inconsistent). In a third??? control??? condition, there was no dissenter. You might ask yourself whether anyone would really judge blue slides to be green because a minority of 2 in your group of 6 thought they were ??? green???. Further, wouldn't they have more influence if they were correct (and agreed with you and the majority) on at least 1/3 of the trials?The results showed that: (1) People alone did not make mistakes; they clearly saw the color as??? blue??? (2) Subjects in the consistent condition reported the slides to be ??? green??? on 8.

42% of the trials;(3) Subjects in the inconsistent condition showed no influence; they called the slides ??? blue??? as did the control. Thus, there is evidence that people might adopt the minority position. Of interest is the

fact that it was the consistent minority, that is, those who repeatedly called the slides ??? green??? who had this influence. II. Minorities as ??? stimulators??? of divergent thinking: Another line of research has argued that consistent minority opinions are important, not only because they sometimes ??? persuade??? or even because they liberate others to be independent.

The fact that minority viewpoints stimulate you to consider different perspectives has large practical consequences for the quality of your thinking and decisions. For example, there is evidence that individuals exposed to minority dissent search for more information on all sides of the issue (Nemeth and Rogers, 1996). People not only read information on one side of the issue (as they do when faced with a majority); they read on all sides of the issue. POLARIZATION Research on this very interesting and applicable phenomenon started with studies that illustrated the risk taking tendencies of groups relative to individual members.

I. The risky shift: Research on this phenomenon actually began with the observation that people seem to make riskier decisions after a group discussion than they would have made alone (Stoner, 1961). This tendency was labeled the ??? risky shift.

??? This notion that groups were more risky than individuals made a certain amount of sense. On the one hand, there is the popular notion that there is a diffusion of responsibility in groups.??” ??? it??™s not me but the group???.

However, the phenomenon proved not to be so simple. There appeared evidence that groups are not always more risky than the individuals;

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sometimes there was evidence of a shift towards caution. II. The cautious shift: Consider a young married man with 2 school age children who has a secure but low paying job but no savings.

He hears of a stock of a relatively unknown company which may soon triple in value or decline considerably. To invest, he must sell his life insurance policy. Now, what probability of success would you require before investing in the stock Frasier, Gouge and Billig (1971) found that some choice dilemmas, such as this one, reliably led to a cautious shift. After discussion, the group decision became more cautious and this cautious attitude remained after discussion. GROUP THINK Groupthink is a type of thought within a deeply cohesive in-group whose members try to minimize conflict and reach consensus without critically testing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas.

It is a second potential negative consequence of group cohesion. Individual creativity, uniqueness, and independent thinking are lost in the pursuit of group cohesiveness. During groupthink, members of the group avoid promoting viewpoints outside the comfort zone of consensus thinking. A variety of motives for this may exist such as a desire to avoid being seen as foolish, or a desire to avoid embarrassing or angering other members of the group. Groupthink may cause groups to make hasty, irrational decisions, where individual doubts are set aside, for fear of upsetting the group's balance.

| Causes of groupthink Highly cohesive groups are much more likely to engage in groupthink, because their cohesiveness often correlates with



unspoken understanding and the ability to work together with minimal explanations. The closer group members are in outlook, the less likely they are to raise questions that might break their cohesion. According to Janis (1972), group cohesion will only lead to groupthink if one of the following two antecedent conditions is present:

- \* Structural faults in the organization: insulation of the group, lack of tradition of impartial leadership, lack of norms requiring methodological procedures, homogeneity of members social background and ideology.
- \* Provocative situational context: high stress from external threats, recent failures, excessive difficulties on the decision-making task, moral dilemmas.

Social psychologist Clark McCauley's three conditions under which groupthink occurs:

- \* Directive leadership.
- \* Homogeneity of members social background and ideology.
- \* Isolation of the group from outside sources of information and analysis.

Symptoms of groupthink

To make groupthink testable, Irving Janis devised eight symptoms indicative of groupthink (1977).

- 1.

1. Illusions of invulnerability creating excessive optimism and encouraging risk taking.
2. Rationalizing warnings that might challenge the groups assumptions.

3. Unquestioned belief in the morality of the group, causing members to ignore the consequences of their actions.
4. Stereotyping those who are opposed to the group as weak, evil, biased, spiteful, disfigured, impotent, or stupid.
5. Direct pressure to conform placed on any member who questions the group, couched in terms of “ disloyalty”.

6. Self-censorship of ideas that deviate from the apparent group consensus.
7. Illusions of unanimity among group members, silence is viewed as agreement.
8. Mind guards ??” self-appointed members who shield the group from dissenting information. Groupthink and de-individuation  
Cults are also studied by sociologists in regard to groupthink and its deindividuation effects. De-individuation is the loss of self-awareness and evaluation apprehension, which occurs in group situations that foster anonymity and draw attention away from the individual.

Preventing groupthink  
According to Irving Janis, decision making groups are not necessarily destined to groupthink. He devised seven ways of preventing groupthink. 1. Leaders should assign each member the role of ??? critical evaluator???. This allows each member to freely air objections and doubts.

2. Higher-ups/ leaders should not express an opinion when assigning a task to a group. 3. The organization should set up several independent groups, working on the same problem. 4. All effective alternatives should be examined. 5. Each member should discuss the groups ideas with trusted people outside of the group.

6. The group should invite outside experts into meetings. Group members should be allowed to discuss with and question the outside experts.

7. At least one group member should be assigned the role of Devils advocate. This should be a different person for each meeting. REFERENCE: Jeanne Nemeth (1999).

Influence and Persuasion in Small Groups. University of California, Berkeley.